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ABSTRACT

A study examined whether self-evaluation of writing should precede peer evaluation, and explored effective strategies for peer evaluation of writing. Seventy-six advanced placement English students in a Raleigh, North Carolina, high school were divided into experimental and control groups. The control group participated in peer evaluation of essays for two semesters, while the experimental group participated in self-evaluation of essays the first semester and peer evaluation of essays the second. All rough drafts, peer evaluation and self-evaluation forms, and final essays were ranked for effectiveness of evaluations in final revisions. Results indicated that peer evaluation of essays resulted in stronger revision in essays than did self-evaluation, while self-evaluation and peer evaluation of essays resulted in moderate revision. After all essays were ranked, students completed a questionnaire, on which most indicated that they preferred peer evaluation of writing to self-evaluation. (Tables of data, the questionnaire, and a peer evaluation form are included.) (HTH)

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Effective Strategies in Peer Evaluation of Writing

Carol E. Harris

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CS 209 991

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES IN PEER EVALUATION OF WRITING

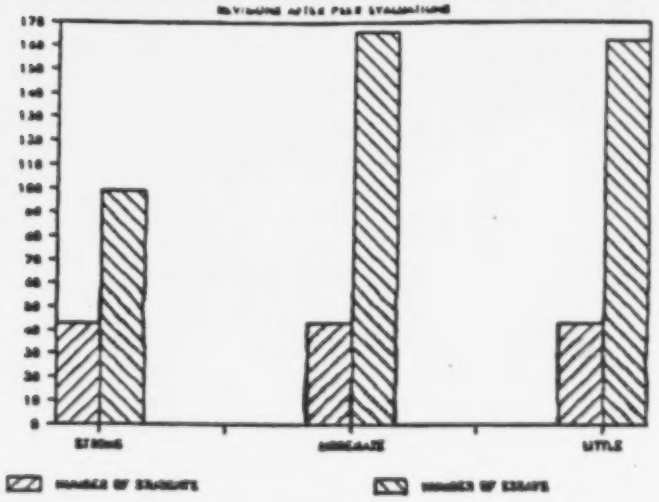
BY

Carol E. Harris

From September, 1985 to May, 1986, seventy-six students in Advanced Placement English 12 at Millbrook Senior High School in Raleigh, North Carolina, participated in a research project funded by the National Council of Teachers of English. The researcher set out to determine if the initial approach to peer evaluation of writing should be handled through self-evaluation before sharing with peers and explored effective strategies for peer evaluation of writing.

To examine if self-evaluation of writing should precede peer evaluation, students were divided into two groups. A control group consisting of forty-three students who participated in peer evaluation of essays both semesters and an experimental group consisting of thirty-three students who participated in self-evaluation of essays the first semester and peer evaluation of essays the second semester. The control group completed a total of 427 essays which were peer evaluated. The experimental group completed a total of 141 essays which were self-evaluated and a total of 129 essays which were peer evaluated. A research assistant read all rough drafts, peer evaluation and self-evaluation forms, and final essays and ranked the effectiveness of the evaluations in the final revisions. The ranking scale indicated whether the revised essay had strong revision or moderate revision or little or no revision. The results appear in the three tables on the next page. With these students, peer

CONTROL GROUP/EVALUATED BOTH SEMESTERS



TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS: 43

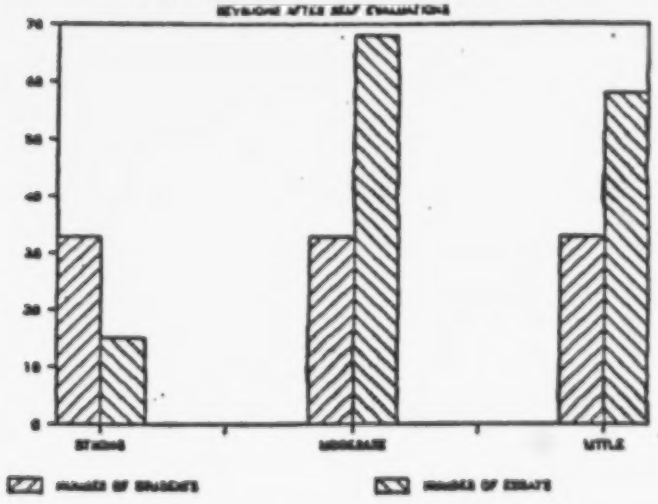
TOTAL IN STRONG REVISION: 99

TOTAL IN MODERATE REVISION: 166

TOTAL IN LITTLE OR NO REVISION: 162

TABLE I

GROUP/EVALUATED FIRST SEMESTER



TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS: 33

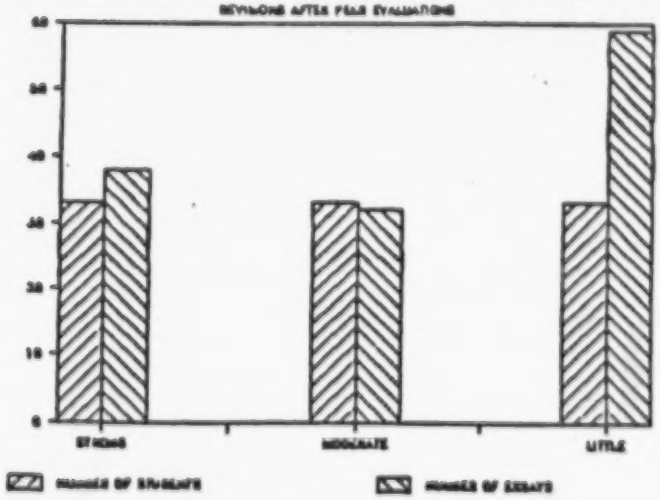
TOTAL IN STRONG REVISION: 15

TOTAL IN MODERATE REVISION: 68

TOTAL IN LITTLE OR NO REVISION: 58

TABLE II

GROUP/EVALUATED SECOND SEMESTER



TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS: 33

TOTAL IN STRONG REVISION: 38

TOTAL IN MODERATE REVISION: 32

TOTAL IN LITTLE OR NO REVISION: 59

TABLE III

evaluation of essays resulted in a stronger revision in essays as opposed to self-evaluation while self-evaluation and peer evaluation of essays resulted almost equally in moderate revision. As shown in the three tables, there were 279 essays which were not affected by either peer or self-evaluation. A few explanations account for these instances. Some essays did not need strong or moderate revisions. On the other hand, some writers were unable to act upon the suggestions of peer evaluators while other writers were not given helpful feedback. The peer evaluation forms and the tasks which the evaluators completed on these forms may not have been helpful in revisions. Finally, some students simply chose not to revise their essays. Toward the end of the research, a pattern emerged related to the performance of those students. The failure to revise their essays was not the result of inadequate self-evaluation or peer evaluation forms or poor peer evaluators. The reasons cited ranged from bad habits in procrastination to unresolved personal problems to little motivation or priority for improvement in writing.

After all essays were ranked, students answered a questionnaire related to their experiences. The questions and the results appear on Page 4. Most students prefer peer evaluation of writing to self-evaluation. However, teachers need to be aware that peer evaluation of writing is not an experience in which every student needs to be involved. A few good writers

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PEER EVALUATION OF WRITING

QUESTIONS	Yes (a)	No (b)	Indifferent (c)
Do you prefer to remain anonymous as an evaluator?	34	31	5
Do you prefer an anonymous evaluator?	25	40	5
Do you prefer to have your paper evaluated by (a) a friend or (b) by someone you hardly know?	19	44	7
Do you prefer a stronger writer than yourself to evaluate your papers?	63	5	1
Has your experience as an evaluator improved your writing skills?	41	26	3
Have your writing skills improved through peer evaluation of your essays?	40	30	1
Have you noticed any instances in which peers have allowed personal feelings to influence evaluation of your essays?	39	29	2
Given a choice of (a) a class using peer group evaluation or (b) a class using traditional teacher evaluation, which would you prefer?	53	13	4
Is your grade (a) higher (b) lower or (c) the same as the final grade in your last English course?	6	20	40
When you write an essay in college, will you have your essays peer evaluated?	41	23	1
If you answered <u>yes</u> to the above question will you feel qualified to explain to the evaluator what needs to be appraised?	33	8	
Are you objective enough to self-evaluate your own essays?	39	26	
If you participated in the experimental group, which procedure is more helpful (a) peer evaluation or (b) self-evaluation?	17	9	2

prefer to work alone. In addition, students should to be given a choice in using which approach he prefers. The role of the teacher is to provide available statistics in research which help a student choose either self-evaluation or peer evaluation.

Students also devised some effective strategies for evaluation of writing. At the conclusion of the research, they ranked all peer evaluation strategies to determine which was most effective, effective, and least effective. After this information was collated, there was not one particular peer evaluation form that was considered more effective than another. What one student felt was most effective for him turned out to be least effective for another. However, the students' comments provide the insight about what makes some peer evaluation forms effective. Below are some suggestions for devising an effective peer evaluation form:

1. A peer evaluation form should cover all areas of the essay: the introduction, the body, the conclusion, mechanics, diction, and other skills in language arts.

2. The peer evaluation form should include a section wherein the writer can direct the evaluator to areas in which the writer feels he is weak.

3. The peer evaluation form should include the names of the peer evaluators, and there should be at least three peer evaluators.

4. Each peer evaluator should receive a separate peer evaluation form and should not have access to the other peer evaluators' comments which may influence his thinking.

5. Each peer evaluation form should include a section wherein the peer evaluator has to give specific suggestions for improvement.

6. Each peer evaluation form should affect the revision of the paper. Many students do not like reader-based evaluation forms which tend to focus on the feelings of the evaluator as a reader rather than as an editor.

7. Peer evaluation forms should not focus on irrelevant tasks such as copying down the main idea or pointing out the structure of the essay.

8. Finally, peer evaluation forms are only the instruments of a caring, thorough, and honest peer evaluator.

A sample peer evaluation form appears on Page 7. From the various comments of students, the strengths of this form are Roman numerals I and II.

Another aspect which students considered were their preferences for arrangements in peer evaluation of writing. Below are the results of that questionnaire:

PEER EVALUATION ARRANGEMENTS (SELECT TWO)	TOTAL NUMBER OF PREFERENCES
Within a small, but permanent peer group of five arranged in the classroom	29
Within the same classroom	40
Within the same subject area and teacher but different classes evaluating each other	39
Within the same subject area and grade level but another teacher's class peer evaluating	12
Within the same subject area, a different teacher and a lower grade level peer evaluating	2
No preference for arrangement, just good evaluators	1
No preference at all	1

From the survey, the most ineffective peer group arrangement for evaluation of writing were peers in another teacher's

WRITER'S NAME _____

PEER EVALUATION FORM

EVALUATOR #1 _____

EVALUATOR #2 _____

EVALUATOR #3 _____

I. WRITER'S COMMENT TO THE EVALUATORS: IN THE SPACE BELOW, THE WRITER SHOULD DIRECT THE EVALUATOR TO AREAS IN THE PAPER WHICH HE FEELS ARE WEAK OR ASK THE EVALUATOR QUESTIONS PERTINENT TO THE PAPER.

II. LANGUAGE USAGE, MECHANICS, SENTENCE STRUCTURE, AND MANUSCRIPT FORM: Identify on the rough draft preferrably in the margin any of the mistakes listed below. Use the abbreviations given below.

A. TYPES OF ERRORS

1. shift in verb tense (t)
2. passive voice (p. v.)
3. unclear pronoun reference (ref.)
4. abbreviations (w)
5. spelling (sp.)
6. punctuation, especially between independent clauses and after subordinate clauses (p)
7. sentence variety (s. s.)
8. clichés (cliché)
9. parallel structure (//) Not only . . . but also
10. word division (p) Be certain to divide words correctly.
11. sentence fragment (frag)
12. citing passages correctly and using proper punctuation (Instruct the student to the handout or to see the teacher.)
13. use of the virgule (/) (Same comment as in 12)

B. UNCLEAR SENTENCES Point out any sentence or sentences that need revising. Put the word unclear beside the area that lacks clarity in the essay. If there are no unclear sentences, write clear below. _____

III. CONTENT EVALUATION

A. RELEVANT PASSAGES CITED FROM HAMLET Check all passages cited from Hamlet for relevancy. If there are any passages that are not fully introduced or explained, indicate those below. Also on the paper, mark irrelevant passage if needed.

B. If the writer has strayed from the assigned topic in any of the paragraphs, indicate when and where he "took the wrong turn." You might say "You have gotten off the assigned topic." Remember the old adage, "If you don't know where you are going, you might end up elsewhere."

C. On the essay topic for Hamlet (see the handout) the writer was to consider some of the following comparisons:

1. the procedures or preparations the avenger undergoes
2. the motive for vengeance and its relative importance
3. the maturity, character, and scruples of the avenger
4. a tragic flaw in the avenger
5. the attainment of the avenger's goal; i. e. Was it successful?

Put a check beside those comparisons included in the essay and circle the comparison that is the best.

D. Conclusion: The evaluator should consider the ideas given on a previous handout about ways to write conclusions. Indicate to the writer whether or not he has a strong or weak or abrupt conclusion. Make suggestions where appropriate.
COMMENTS BELOW:

E. Briefly point out to the writer the strongest statement or point made in the essay. Explain why.

F. Comment about the title of the essay. Evaluators, do you like the title?

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classroom and peers in a lower grade level. Students felt that these evaluators were too critical and too impersonal. They preferred an evaluator who was given the same writing assignment, who knew the expectations of the teacher, and who shared similar obstacles or frustrations. With the small, intimate peer group arrangement of five, students indicated that toward the end of the school year, this group became less effective in their critical appraisals and weakened in their ability to be objective.

Most students preferred either peers within the classroom or peers in other class periods belonging to the same teacher to evaluate their essays. These two arrangements correlate with the questionnaire on Page 4 wherein forty-four students expressed a preference for peer evaluation by someone they hardly knew.

Finally, peer group arrangments should be the responsibility of the teacher. Monitoring the behavior of the peer group and soliciting feedback from students about the peer group arrangements and the peer evaluation forms are crucial to the effectiveness of peer evaluation. While peer evaluation of writing is not the panacea for all the problems students have, it is far superior to the traditional methods of students writing an essay and having only a few minutes to confer with the teacher about revisions.